

Israel's Relations with the East African States of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania— From Independence to the Present

ABSTRACT

An examination of these relations not only through specific bilateral and multilateral concerns, but also within the respective contexts of Cold War, post-Cold War, and Middle Eastern and African politics. The article demonstrates that the region plays a complementary role to Israel's relations with Ethiopia, while the East African states have been drawn towards Israel primarily due to country-specific issues of security and economic development.

INTRODUCTION

FOLLOWING ITS INDEPENDENCE IN 1948, ISRAEL DEVELOPED AS A “Garrison state” seeking out friendly countries outside the West (its prime area of interest) and just beyond the hostile Arab world with whom it could cooperate.¹ While Israel had some limited success in Asia, the outlook on the continent of Africa appeared to be more promising as countries there—with the exceptions of South Africa, Ethiopia, and Liberia—were undergoing a process of decolonization during the late 1950s and the early 1960s and seeking to create new and viable institutions, a situation in which Israel had some experience. At the same time, more specifically the Horn of Africa, traditionally including Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Djibouti, Israel either developed (with Ethiopia) or sought to develop unsuccessfully (with Sudan) what is referred to as a “peripheral alliance”,

which also included Turkey and Iran. During much of the Cold War and after, Ethiopia and Israel have cooperated against efforts by Arab countries or Arab League members to expand their influence in the region and later against Islamic militancy.

The countries of East Africa—Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania—located on the fringe of the Horn and/or along the Indian Ocean littoral—to varying degrees have had similar interests as Israel in maintaining security in the region, including the protection of maritime traffic. Like Israel, its founding leaders embraced socialism, but their successors have become more amenable to a market economy. In the case of the East Africans, their colonial past influenced their aversion to Western capitalism. While the East African states have shared a common goal of regional cooperation amongst themselves, political turmoil during the rule of Idi Amin (1971–79) in Uganda and the respective governments' differing views over the years regarding what policies would be best in promoting national interests have impacted on bilateral relations as well as those with Israel (and other foreign countries).

Israel has attempted to steer clear of regional disputes, while the aforementioned African states eventually established the East African Community in 1999, whose slogan is “One People, One Destiny” and whose “ultimate goal” is a “political federation”.² The East African countries are drawn together through a common colonial past under British rule, a shared lingua franca (Swahili), and transportation and trade networks. Mombasa, Kenya, has the second largest container port on the east coast of Africa—after Durban, South Africa—and is the primary port for landlocked Uganda, while Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, is fourth largest after Djibouti and also serves the African hinterland via railways and roads.³ Kenya and Uganda (during the first decade of its independence and once again in recent years) have cooperated in varying degrees with Israel in security matters and have benefitted from its technological assistance especially in such fields as agriculture and water management.

However, Israel's relations with Tanzania, except during the early years, have been more distant as the latter has consistently shown greater sympathy than its neighbors for the Palestinian cause and a stronger concern for the end of Apartheid in South Africa, a country with whom Israel developed close ties during the 1970s-1980s.

This author and others have provided much insight regarding Israeli-Ethiopian relations and its connection with international politics in the Horn and beyond.⁴ The article examines ties between Israel and the East African states and how these relations for Israel play a complementary

role to those with Ethiopia and are thus important in the context of both interregional and international relations.⁵

Historically, Kenya has shown the most enthusiasm for cooperation with countries in the Western world, while Tanzania has devoted more emphasis to issues affecting the developing world including struggles for self-determination. Uganda has shifted between those two courses, but in the last couple of decades its approach has been closer to that of Kenya.

As for relations specifically with Israel, just like with almost all other non-Arab African states, those in East Africa were relatively close at first following the process of decolonization on the continent; later, beginning around the time of the 1967 Six-Day War and extending into the late-1980s, those ties were either still close without formal ties in the case of Kenya, or were terminated entirely, but improved once again especially following the end of the Cold War, with Israel and the Palestinians engaging in periodic negotiations and foreign assistance to the continent of Africa no longer being connected to superpower rivalry.

As for Israel's objectives in Africa in general, it was described thus in 1972: "To achieve a proper blend first of altruistic aspirations [i.e.,] the wish to help and second of [our] own legitimate advantage—gaining friends, furthering political information and advancing economic objectives."⁶ These aims still hold true today as does enhancing security interests in the particular case of East Africa. However, altruism has been deemphasized and is generally more applicable to countries facing crises and/or having closer political ties with Israel.

Out of Israel's 11 resident embassies in Africa, four are located in the northeastern part of the continent—Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Kenya—with the latter also representing the Jewish state's interests in Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, and the Seychelles. However, Israel has diplomatic representation with 40 African countries, either through embassies or a representative in Jerusalem. The only non-Arab League states without formal ties are Chad, Mali, and Niger.⁷

THE EARLY YEARS OF ISRAEL-EAST AFRICA RELATIONS

In January 1965, Kenya's first prime minister (1963–64) following independence and later President Jomo Kenyatta (1963–78), at a Nairobi luncheon hosted by members of the diplomatic corps stated that: "Our external policy is firmly based on non-alignment. We take no sides, and will not be dragged into intrigues between rival groups and power blocs. [In

addition,] we adhere to the Charter of the OAU [Organization of African Unity].”⁸ While calling for majority rule in Rhodesia, he made no mention of Apartheid South Africa, with whom Western countries had normal relations; he emphasized his concern for a peaceful compromise regarding Vietnam, which had Cold War implications. Kenya has held to the same principles concerning the Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. In the aforementioned speech, Kenyatta noted that his ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU) party was committed to African socialism, which rejected both “Western capitalism” and “Eastern communism” and sought to promote economic development and social progress through the “Africanization” of the economy and public service.⁹

In October 1967, Tanzania’s first President Julius K. Nyerere (1964–85), and before that prime minister since independence in 1961 of Tanganyika (which merged with Zanzibar in 1964), at a conference of the ruling Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) party in Mwanza, stated that that in regard to nonalignment:

We have no desire to be ‘anti-West’ in our foreign policies. We shall deal with each problem . . . on its own merits . . . We wish to live in friendship with all states and all peoples . . . We should always try to limit the effect of differences which occur, and settle them by negotiation. Only in the case of South Africa, the racialist colonialism of Portugal [in Mozambique, Angola and elsewhere in Africa], and the Smith regime of Southern Rhodesia, does such settlement of differences seem inherently impossible. With those countries we can never negotiate until they abandon their present rejection of . . . the equality of man.¹⁰

Nyerere was also committed to *Ujamaa* (literally meaning “family-hood” in Swahili) and a form of African socialism. He noted, “It is opposed to capitalism, which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of exploitation of man by man; and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism which seeks to build a happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man.”¹¹ Rather, it emphasizes equality and cooperation and it is easy to see how Israel’s experiences with kibbutzim initially appealed to Tanzania.

Uganda’s second prime minister (who served from 1962, the year that country received its independence, until 1966) and later President Milton Obote (1966–71 and 1980–85), in March 1963 stated that: “We in Uganda are against any political blocs in Africa or in the world. We don’t believe in a divided Africa or foreign bases . . . We believe in non-alignment.” Obote also

identified his country as being among one of the most “progressive” on the continent.¹² Embracing nonalignment did not hinder these African leaders from developing extensive relations with Israel, as it was not until 1967 when many countries in the Soviet bloc severed diplomatic relations as a result of the Six-Day War that Israel tended to be closely identified with the West and the Palestinian issue began to gain traction in the developing world.

Asher Naim, former Israeli ambassador to Ethiopia (1990–91), posted to both Kenya and Uganda (1961–64), reflects that Kenyatta’s “feelings toward Jews were favorable” and that he “remained friendly and trustful toward Israel all his life”.¹³ In 1963 Kenyan journalist A.J. “Tony” Hughes noted that “Israel has projected an increasing influence in East Africa” and that when Nyerere was questioned about ties with Israel at a press conference during Tanganyika’s independence celebrations, he stated: “We are not going to let our friends [meaning the Arab world] determine who our enemies shall be.”¹⁴ Both Kenyatta and Nyerere’s brother Joseph, leader of TANU Youth League and who according to Hughes “spent considerable periods” visiting Israel, regarded that state as a model. The former was quoted as saying: “You [Israelis] have built a nation with Jews coming from all corners of the world; we want to build a unified Kenya composed of a multitude of tribes joined together through *Harambee* [Swahili for ‘pulling together’].”¹⁵ Joseph Nyerere stated:

Israel is a small country . . . but it can offer a lot to a small country like mine. We can learn a great deal because the problems of Tanganyika are similar to Israel’s. . . . What are our problems? [T]wo major tasks: building the nation and changing the face of the land, physically and economically.”¹⁶

Israel offered a good alternative to African leaders who wished to reduce their dependence on the former colonial powers. By the end of 1962, Israel had 22 embassies in Africa, and ten years later maintained diplomatic relations with 32 states.

Areas of cooperation between Israel and the East African states included technical assistance and training programs in various fields, military and security relations, and trade and joint investments; in addition, Israel provided modest loans, too small for these countries’ needs. While Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda were especially keen on receiving assistance and in the expansion of trade relations, Israel highly valued political support vis-à-vis the Arab states at international forums.

As agricultural production was the mainstay of most African economies, Israeli expertise was sought after. Tanzania was particularly interested

in the development of cooperative villages along the lines of *moshavim*. An important project was established in the cotton-growing region of Mwanza during 1962–65 designed not only to improve production capacity, but also for farmers to become active supporters of the TANU ruling party. Israelis introduced the use of irrigation, machinery, fertilizers, and pesticides and experimented with other crops such as corn, onions, and peanuts that grew well, but did not provide the income comparable to cotton. While recruits may have had fervor for TANU, many were not good farmers, and the Tanzanian government deemed the projects too expensive. The Mwanza project was regarded as a failure due to the inability to coordinate Israeli technoeconomic change with Tanzanian social and political mobilization.¹⁷

By 1966, Tanzania—along with Kenya and Uganda—were three of only ten African countries receiving some form of direct military assistance from Israel. Although Tanzania was the third largest beneficiary of such, following Ethiopia and Uganda, in that order,¹⁸ it did not publicly acknowledge the assistance. When Israel turned down a request from Tanzania, in December 1964, to provide aircraft gratis despite previously having trained Tanzanian pilots and parachutists, the Tanzanians looked elsewhere to both the Western and Eastern blocs. Before then, following a mutiny by battalions of the Tanganyika Rifles in January 1964, President Nyerere disbanded the army and sent the remaining soldiers into the National Service, while creating a new army whose core were trainees from the National Service; that latter paramilitary group was modeled on Israel's *Nahal*, which combined farming with protection of agricultural settlements along the Jewish state's borders. However, the bulk of the National Service's young recruits proved to be either incapable or unwilling to maintain farming projects and were more desirous of jobs in the military, police, or civil service. Nyerere's brother Joseph became disappointed with Israel's efforts and the last Israeli personnel left by 1968.¹⁹

More successful was the Israeli navy's training in January 1965 of Tanzania's first marine police unit to patrol that country's Indian Ocean coastline. During the 1970s, Tanzania became more dependent on the People's Republic of China, but before that it became critical of Israel's actions against the Arabs during the 1967 War.

Kenya, which proved to be Israel's most reliable partner, had no problem in publicizing Israel's technical assistance. When it became independent, Kenyatta announced that Kenyan pilots had received secret training in Israel. Less known, but quite extensive, was Kenya's partnership with Israel in intelligence gathering and security cooperation. Early in 1962, Mossad's chief official in the region met with Kenyatta and subsequently

Nairobi became one of Mossad's most important centers of operation in Africa, benefitting the security of both countries.²⁰

Asher Naim notes that Israel's friendship led to lasting relationships with many Kenyan politicians including Mwai Kibaki, president from 2002 to 2013, and vice president under his predecessor, the successor to Kenyatta, Daniel Arap Moi. However, Naim writes most glowingly of Tom Mboya, an influential member of Kenyatta's cabinet before his assassination in 1969. In addition, there was a South African-born minister of Agriculture in Kenyatta's government, Bruce McKenzie, who assisted the Israelis during the Entebbe raid of July 1976 and was probably an agent for both British and Israeli intelligence.²¹ While his appointment was made to calm the remaining settler farmers, Kenya also felt vulnerable in North Eastern Province bordering Somalia, where Somalis made up a majority of the population; they therefore allowed British military advisors to remain after independence and assist in defeating a secessionist insurrection aided militarily by Somalia, known as the *Shifta War* (1963–67) and ended in a stalemate. Egypt and Sudan provided "murmurs of support" for the Somalis, but Somalia was generally diplomatically isolated within the OAU, where African states opposed irredentist claims. Kenya signed a defense agreement with Ethiopia, which also had good relations with Israel, and had to contend with Somali irredentism in the Ogaden province; the latter would subsequently in 1977–78 fight a war to push Somalia out of that territory.²² Somalia had joined the Arab League in 1974 and had the support of most Arab states.

In Uganda, Israel took over responsibility for military training from Britain in the mid-1960s and developed extensive connections with the government of President Obote, who was heavily dependent on the support of the army for his political survival.²³ Later in the decade, although he continued to cooperate with Israel, he became critical in international forums of Israel's actions following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.²⁴ The Ugandan leader drew closer to Nyerere's views regarding the liberation of southern Africa. Obote blamed Israel for Commander Idi Amin's military coup in January 1971. Israeli officials were concerned at what appeared to be Obote's reconciliation with Sudan as Israel was reportedly advising and militarily supplying, through Uganda, southern Sudanese Anya Nya rebels waging war against the government in Khartoum; they were not supportive of the coup, which was locally driven due to discontentment with Obote within Ugandan military.²⁵ It was Amin who facilitated arrangements in March 1972 that formally brought an end to the first round of a conflict lasting almost 17 years, just prior to severing ties with Israel.

Before the rupture in relations, between 1964 and 1971, Israel sold Uganda 26 training and transport planes and trained Ugandans to be pilots but it was the Soviet bloc that provided seven MIG fighter jets in 1968. Israel sold the Ugandans WW II vintage M-4 Sherman tanks that were operational at least until the mid-1980s²⁶ as well as 120mm mortars (also supplied to Kenya); some of these arms were accepted as partial payments for imports.²⁷ Ties were so close that Prime Minister Levi Eshkol visited Uganda and Kenya on an official trip in June 1966 that also included Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Madagascar, Senegal, and Congo-Kinshasa. Obote expressed his gratitude toward Israel for having “played an important role in helping Uganda”.²⁸

As with Kenya, Israel cooperated with Uganda in intelligence gathering and in agricultural projects, while Israeli companies were engaged in infrastructural improvements, which included the construction of roads, airports, and factories. While the early to mid-1960s were the halcyon days of Israel’s relations with the states of East Africa, and a good share of the continent, the Six-Day War ushered in a period of transition, where ties with most countries became more complicated.

A DISTANCING AND FORMAL TERMINATION OF RELATIONS

Before the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Arab attempts especially by Egypt to undermine, loosen Israel’s connections with the African countries, or to challenge Israel’s policies through international organizations had little or no effect. As a result of the war, one country (Guinea) broke off diplomatic relations, while Nyerere sent a message of support to President Nasser “in defense of your rights against imperialism”. African leaders in general were reluctant to discuss the Arab-Israeli conflict at the OAU or to label Israel as an “aggressor”.²⁹ They did, however, want to see the UN as the forum to work for the evacuation of Israeli troops from Egypt. By 1971, African leaders were beginning to lose patience at the lack of any progress toward that goal and the inability of the UN sanctioned Gunnar Jarring Mission to achieve a peaceful settlement of the conflict based on Security Council Resolution 242. The failure of the OAU Peace Mission, led by Léopold Senghor, tilted opinion towards Egypt and the Arab states who were perceived as having a more “reasonable” attitude.³⁰ Before the Mission trip, Senghor stated that “We black Africans understand both the Arabs and the Israelis, because, together with us, they form a triad of suffering peoples” and that he believed

Israeli penetration in Africa proved very effective, in general, because the Israeli are cultured, technically efficient and methodical. If not for the Six-Day War, the Israelis would have increased their influence further. . . . The war stopped the expansion of Israeli cooperation with Africa. If this trend is to be reversed, the Israeli-Egyptian problem must first be solved.³¹

Susan Aurelia Gitelson blames the international political environment at the time of the OAU Mission Report, which was followed by a UN General Assembly debate in December 1971 (emphasizing "Third World" solidarity) and later an OAU heads of state summit meeting in Rabat, Morocco (that adopted a pro-Egyptian resolution by "consensus") in June 1972.³² While Uganda became the second country in Africa to break off diplomatic relations with Israel more than two months earlier, that development was related to internal politics rather than the failure of OAU Mission. It was nevertheless a blow to Israel, which had been concentrating its efforts on about a dozen states in Africa, including Ethiopia and all of those in East Africa.³³

In 1965, Idi Amin received training in Israel to become a paratrooper, and as Chief of Staff of the Ugandan military had very good relations with Col. Chaim Bar-Lev, head of the Israel's military mission in Uganda. However, the latter was not complicit in Amin's January 1971 coup.³⁴ Nevertheless, Amin traveled to Israel on an Israeli aircraft in July that year, his first foreign trip as president, where he met with Prime Minister Golda Meir, Foreign Minister Abba Eban, and Defense Minister Moshe Dayan. Amin promised to open an embassy in Israel and to support Israel at international forums; he showed a willingness to expand civilian projects such as developing water resources in the semi-arid Karamoja region of northeastern Uganda.

Discussions regarding military assistance encountered problems due to Amin's aggressive intentions towards Tanzania, in which Obote had taken refuge and from which he coveted territory so as to gain access to the Indian Ocean at Tanga, located between Mombasa and Dar es Salaam. Israel rejected his requests to buy Phantom jet fighters and armed boats for use on Lake Victoria as well as a loan for £10m that would have become a grant given the debt of tens of millions of dollars that Uganda already owed for weaponry and work done by civilian companies. While Amin continued to praise the Israelis, he also sought aid from Egypt's President Anwar Sadat.³⁵ In January 1972, Uganda's education minister visited Cairo where he was encouraged to seek assistance from Libyan leader Muammar

Qadhafi; the following month, Amin met with the latter in Tripoli where the two presidents “emphasized their desire to base their regimes on Islam” and expressed their support for the Arab “struggle against Zionism and imperialism”, for the “liberation” of captured Arab territories by Israel and for the “right of return for the Palestinian people to their homes and to their lands”.³⁶ While Libya, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab countries provided financial support, Amin was more concerned with boosting his power at home and in the region.

The Libyans and Saudis continued their diplomatic activities during 1972 and the following year offering financial incentives, which in the long-term fell short of expectations, to African countries to break off diplomatic relations with Israel, but it was not an important factor in East Africa. Nevertheless, by the outbreak of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War on 6 October seven African states had done so. During the war, which ended with a ceasefire on 25 October, another 10 African countries severed ties with Israel, including Tanzania, while an equal number did so in the war’s immediate aftermath, including Kenya.³⁷

Tanzania’s motivation was solidarity with Egypt, while Kenya broke off formal diplomatic relations with Israel as Ethiopia, regarded as one of Israel’s strongest allies and with whom it had a security agreement, had done so earlier.³⁸ Nevertheless, Kenya and a few other states—Ghana, Togo, and Côte d’Ivoire—would maintain informal (though quite regular) relations with Israel through interest sections in the embassies of other countries, while other African states also continued to engage in economic ties.³⁹ Mauritius waited until 1976 to sever ties, while Lesotho, Malawi, and Swaziland were the only African states to maintain relations with Israel; these same countries also had formal ties with South Africa. As Israel’s relations were toned down with much of Africa, those with South Africa grew to include sales of military equipment and cooperation on nuclear weapons. At the same time, Iran openly and some Arab countries quietly supplied the Apartheid regime with crude oil.⁴⁰

At an extraordinary session of the OAU’s Council of Ministers in November 1973, the following resolution was adopted by the foreign ministers present:

The open military collusion between the United States, Portugal, South Africa, Rhodesia and Israel during the recent Middle East War further confirms the justification of the preoccupation of the African and Arab countries and has further strengthened their conviction in the need for a common struggle.⁴¹

While collusion was an exaggerated accusation, the Arab world continued to emphasize parallels between the situations in Israel and Southern Africa, capitalizing on revulsion for Apartheid and minority-rule and opposition to Israel's occupation of Arab territory, including lands inhabited by Palestinians. UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 of November 1975 equating Zionism with racism, passed with a vote of 72 to 35, with 32 abstentions, took note of Resolution 77 adopted by the Heads of State and Government at their OAU summit meeting in Kampala just a few months earlier. It stated

that the racist regime in occupied Palestine and the racist regimes in Zimbabwe and South Africa have a common imperialist origin, forming a whole and having the same racist structure and being organically linked in their policy aimed at repression of the dignity and integrity of the human being.⁴²

Tanzania and Uganda joined the majority, which included among non-Arab African states 18 others, while Kenya abstained along with 11 others;⁴³ 5 were opposed (Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Malawi, and Swaziland).

While formal political relations were broken off, ironically Israel's exports to Sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa) between 1973 and 1978 doubled, with Nigeria, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania, Togo, and Ghana (in that order) being Israel's major trading partners.⁴⁴ Israel exported fertilizers, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, industrial machinery, and electronics, while it imported agricultural products such as timber, cotton, cocoa, coffee, and tea. It also exported military equipment. In 1978, Kenya bought two missile boats and 48 sea-to-sea Gabriel missiles, which were delivered in 1979 and 1982, respectively.⁴⁵

In July 1976, a small group of Kenyan government officials ensured the needed assistance, through refueling aircraft and intelligence gathering, for Israel's well-known military rescue mission to release the hostages of an Air France flight from Tel-Aviv hijacked by German and Palestinian terrorists at Entebbe airport in Uganda. As luck would have it, the Israelis had the layout of the terminal as it was constructed by Solel Boneh.⁴⁶ Just six months earlier, Amin had supported an attempt by terrorists to shoot down an El Al airliner at Nairobi airport with surface-to-air missiles that was thwarted by Mossad agents; the terrorists were sent to Israel for trial.

The remaining 106 Jewish hostages and the crew of the Air France plane were supposed to be traded for the aforementioned terrorists and others thought to be imprisoned in Kenya, Israel, and elsewhere. Kenyatta

distanced himself to deny accountability, while other senior members of government were not informed of details of Kenya's assistance in the Israeli rescue mission.

Kenya was disturbed by Amin's claim to territories transferred from Uganda to Kenya by the British in 1902; despite Uganda being far too dependent on Kenya for trade and transportation, following the rescue mission, the US provided Kenya with the necessary military support to deter any thoughts of aggressive action that Amin may have contemplated.⁴⁷ However, two years later, former Kenyan government official McKenzie, who had assisted the Israelis along with Kenya's Attorney-General Charles Njonjo, head of the paramilitary General Service Unit Ben Gethi, and Commissioner of Police Bernard Hinga, in "Operation Thunderbolt/Yonatan", was killed by Ugandan agents who planted a bomb on his private aircraft.⁴⁸

Arye Oded, who headed Israel's interest section at Denmark's embassy in Nairobi during 1978–81, operated as an "ambassador" without formal title and business was usual.⁴⁹ In March 1981, two key Israeli officials, Rahamim Timor, director of MASHAV (Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation), and David Kimche, Mossad's regional chief for Africa, paid a visit to Nairobi. In December the following year, Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir briefly met with Kenya's President Moi at Nairobi airport, on his way back to Israel from a visit to Kinshasa, Zaire. Moi requested Israel's help with his personal security.⁵⁰

In April 1979, in reaction to Ugandan incursions, more than 40,000 Tanzanian troops invaded Uganda with no serious resistance and ousted Amin, who fled into permanent exile with his family to Saudi Arabia via Libya. This was a humiliation for the Libyans, who had committed a small "mixture of regulars, militia, and hapless Islamic Legionnaires low in skills and motivation".⁵¹ Less than a month earlier, Egypt had signed a peace treaty with Israel, and beginning with Zaire in May 1982, some African countries were gradually reestablishing formal relations with Israel. By December 1988, when Kenya did so, it had been preceded by Liberia (1983), Côte d'Ivoire (1985), Cameroon (1986), and Togo (1987). In 1989 and again in 1991, two other African countries each reestablished relations with Israel, but most did so between 1992 and 1994, including Uganda in July 1994.

Tanzania, under the tenure of Ali Hassan Mwinyi, a Zanzibari Muslim (1985–95), who took a strong stand against fundamentalist organizations that developed in the 1990s and sought Israeli assistance against malaria in his home region, waited until February 1995,⁵² becoming the next to last of those that had severed ties in the early 1970s, just a week before Burundi.⁵³

More than 30 African countries (including Uganda and Tanzania) recognized the State of Palestine almost immediately following the Algiers Declaration of the Palestinian National Council in November 1988, having allowed the PLO to open offices in their capitals during the late 1970s with Tanzania being the first non-Arab African country to do so.⁵⁴

Kenya's position was unclear. When the PLO's representative in Nairobi, Yousef Awad, requested "official recognition" from Foreign Minister Robert John Ouko, the latter said that his country "did not issue statements recognizing any state or government . . . [but] we have given complete support to the PLO for long and it would be unfortunate if this has gone unnoticed by the organization."⁵⁵ The following month, Kenya reestablished formal relations with Israel, keen to show its balanced approach.

RECONCILIATION AND RELATIONS SINCE THE END OF THE COLD WAR

In December 1991, the UN General Assembly voted to revoke Resolution 3379 by a vote of 111 to 25, with 13 abstentions. Its sponsors included nine states from Africa. Although Kenya was not among that group, it voted in favor along with 25 other African counties. Mali was the only non-Arab League member from Africa that was opposed, while eight abstained, including Uganda and Tanzania, and five were absent.⁵⁶ Although most African countries still had not reestablished relations with Israel, at the end of the Cold War Arab states no longer had the diplomatic support of a large Communist bloc. In 1993 Israel and the PLO signed a Declaration of Principles that was supposed to lead to a "just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement" between the two parties.⁵⁷

Kenya was one of a handful of countries where Israeli export trade and economic relations continued to increase into and through the 1980s, despite the break in diplomatic relations. In 1979, in reaction to the activities of the Arab League's Central Boycott office in Damascus directed against Kenyan businesses alleged to have traded with Israel, Kenya warned that it "can never accept that the Arab states, or any other state for that matter, has the right to dictate to Kenya who to trade or not to trade with."⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Israeli companies were engaged in projects worth over \$500m not only in Kenya, but also in Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire among other places.⁵⁹ Technical cooperation programs, which had withered away during the 1970s, were reintroduced on a limited basis, usually in the form of courses for African trainees and financed in part by the US and European

partners, while Israeli embassies in Africa were in the process of being reestablished in fewer places than had been the case prior to 1973, due to financial costs and security concerns.

Today, of the three East African states, Israel has an embassy only in Kenya, which reopened in 1988, although in recent years there has been talk of opening diplomatic missions in Uganda and Tanzania as relations have improved.⁶⁰ Writing in 2005, Arye Oded, who served as Israel's ambassador to Kenya during 1991–95 and engaged in discussions with Ugandan President Museveni, who still serves in that position, to restore diplomatic relations, described Uganda as "friendly to Israel".⁶¹ In Tanzania, on the other hand, which is only one of the three East African states with a Palestinian embassy, political relations have been fairly distant, although economic ties have increased dramatically in the last few years.⁶²

Meanwhile, Kenya is the only one with an embassy in Israel, which it opened in 1995. A year earlier, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin made an official visit to Nairobi, following that of President Moi to Israel, the first by a Kenyan head of state since independence.⁶³ While Kenya has been the recipient of financial aid for projects from the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), established in 1973 and based in Khartoum—as has its East African neighbors⁶⁴—and conducts a significant amount of trade with some countries in the Arab and Muslim worlds, it also values business ties, MASHAV programs, and security arrangements with Israel.

In 2014, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) accounted for 6% of Kenya's imports, fourth behind China, India, and the US, and received 4.1% of Kenya's exports, ninth and just behind Egypt (4.4%) and Pakistan (4.3%).⁶⁵ Uganda also has significant trade with the UAE, which in 2014 accounted for 14.2% of its imports, second just behind India and China, and received 9.8% of Uganda's exports (also second).⁶⁶

Most pressing concerns for both Kenya and Uganda are shared security issues given the development of indigenous radical Islamic factions in the 1990s, inspired and/or assisted from abroad and the proximity of wars in nearby countries. Somalia was without a central government or effective institutions of authority for approximately two decades beginning in 1991 when Muhammad Siad Barre fled the country and has faced an Islamic insurgency from al-Shabaab, aligned with al-Qaida, over the last decade. South Sudan was plagued by civil wars, which lasted from 1983 to 2005 and again from December 2013 to August 2015, while intermittent terrorist attacks or threats on Kenyan and Ugandan territory. Both Kenya and Uganda have sought military equipment and/or assistance from Israel in addition to technical aid in agriculture and other civilian fields.

Tanzania, with a larger Muslim population—35% (with Zanzibar at more than 99%)—than Uganda (12.1%) and Kenya (11.1%),⁶⁷ wants to avoid attacks from al-Shabaab. It does, however, currently have a contingent of 158 troops in the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).⁶⁸ While it has committed to training soldiers from the Somali National Army,⁶⁹ it has not sent troops to Somalia as part of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) military mission of the African Union in that country as Kenya and Uganda have done.⁷⁰

In February 2010, on a visit to Israel, Kenya's Internal Security Minister George Saitoti told his Israeli counterpart Yitzhak Aharonovich that “The jihad is taking over Somalia and threatening to take over Kenya and all of Africa.”⁷¹ In March 2012, when Kenya joined AMISOM operations, Ugandan army spokesman Colonel Felix Kulayigye, whose country had been involved militarily in Somalia since 2007, explained Uganda's motive for intervention: “If Somalia is unstable, Kenya is unstable. And if Kenya's unstable, then we are unstable first and foremost.”⁷² In June 2014, Uhuru Kenyatta, Kenya's president and the son of Jomo, at a forum in Nairobi attended by Israeli business and political leaders including Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman, called Israel a “true friend who has always stood with Kenya” and stated that the “only way to defeat terrorism . . . [was] to continue supporting one another in security and trade issues.”⁷³ In 2012, trade between the two countries amounted to \$139m, while Kenya accounted for 8% of Israel's entire trade with Africa.⁷⁴

Foreign Minister Liberman, accompanied by an entourage of private arms dealers, had made a high profile nine-day official visit to five African countries (Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Ghana) in September 2009 in part to counter Iran's influence on the continent, especially in Sudan and Eritrea, under President Mahmud Ahmedinejad (2005–13);⁷⁵ the Iranian leader also visited Kenya in February 2009, while Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga reciprocated with a trip to Tehran three months later. However, Kenya's government “made it clear that it was not interested in relations with Iran which would come at the expense of its ties with the US.”⁷⁶

Uganda's President Museveni made an official trip to Iran in May 2009, while Ahmedinejad reciprocated with a visit to Kampala in April 2010. During this time, Uganda was elected as Africa's member on the UN Security Council and was acting in part as a mediator between the West and Iran on the nuclear issue.⁷⁷ According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, since 2002 Uganda has been one of the biggest customers in Africa for Israeli arms, including guns, mortars, and the upgrading of MIG fighter jets.⁷⁸ In November 2011, both Museveni

and Odinga made visits to Israel; the former's trip, his second since 2003, was arranged by former director of operations for Mossad, Rafi Eitan.⁷⁹ Upon his return to Kenya, Odinga asserted that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "promised to help build a coalition against fundamentalism", including many states in the Horn and East Africa.⁸⁰

Beginning in early 2014, probably in return for some form of assistance, Israel reportedly began sending to Uganda African asylum seekers, regarded as illegal immigrants, who accepted payments of \$3,500 to voluntarily leave Israel; in September 2013, there were over 53,000 in Israel, mostly from Sudan and Eritrea.⁸¹ In June 2014, Lieberman made a ten-day official visit to five African countries (Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Rwanda). Before leaving on the trip he stated: "The relationship with African countries is of prime strategic importance for the State of Israel from the security, diplomatic and economic standpoints."⁸² Lieberman resigned in May of the next year, but Israel continues to pursue one of his trip's goals—observer status in the African Union, something it lost in 2002 when that organization replaced the OAU, even though the Palestinian Authority was conferred such in 2013.⁸³

At the time of Liberman's visit Kenya Airways announced plans to begin non-stop flights between Nairobi and Tel-Aviv.⁸⁴ In November 2002, following an attempted rocket attack against an Israeli Arkia charter flight leaving Mombasa and the bombing of an Israeli-owned hotel in that city, El Al ceased scheduled operations out of Nairobi. Ethiopian Airlines, which currently code shares with El Al is the only African carrier with regularly scheduled flights to Tel-Aviv.⁸⁵

While Tanzania was not on Liberman's itinerary, former Israeli ambassador to Kenya, Gil Haskel—who was succeeded by Yahel Vilan in May 2015—stated in April 2014: "When looking at East Africa, Tanzania is a prime investment and economic activity target because of its high growth in recent years, and what is considered a steady political scene."⁸⁶ Israel made an impact in that country in agribusiness through Balton Tanzania established in 1965, which has a sister company Amiran Kenya two years older; it sells seeds, greenhouses, and systems for water management and irrigation among other things.⁸⁷ Kijani Agro manages coffee and wheat farms, but also trains small farmers to grow vegetables and fruit using good environmental practices.⁸⁸ Israeli companies also have interests in gold and copper mines.⁸⁹ During 2014, both El Al and Arkia began operating charter flights to Tanzania.⁹⁰

Uganda's and Tanzania's official representatives to Israel (and the Palestinian Authority) are their respective ambassadors to Egypt; Kenya's

ambassador in Tel-Aviv also represents his country to the Palestinians. Ironically, while both Kenya and Uganda are closer to Israel than Tanzania they both have embassies in Iran; the Tanzanians do not. Kenya's other embassies in the Middle East are in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Sudan, Kuwait and Libya,⁹¹ while those of Uganda are in Sudan, Libya, and Saudi Arabia.⁹² Tanzania has embassies in UAE, Oman, and Saudi Arabia.⁹³

Even though Kenya has been the friendliest towards Israel of three East African states, in November 2012 it sponsored along with almost 60 other countries a resolution in the UN General Assembly according Palestine "Non-Member Observer State" status, which passed 138 to 9, with 41 abstentions. No African countries voted against, but three abstained (Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Rwanda) and three were absent (Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, and Madagascar). Of the three East African countries only Tanzania spoke out during the vote. Its representative noted that the resolution presented an opportunity for the international community to recognize the "independent" State of Palestine as it had in the past recognized Israel. "We are optimistic that the enhanced status granted today by the Assembly to the State of Palestine will provide renewed impetus to the parties to pursue vigorously all efforts to create a conducive environment to the resumption of direct and meaningful negotiations."⁹⁴ Thus, Tanzania like its East African neighbors favors a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem.

CONCLUSION

Since independence from Britain, Kenya, of all the countries in East Africa, has had the closest ties with Israel. As with neighboring Ethiopia, it was concerned during the 1960s-1980s with the irredentist inclination of Somalia and later with that country's instability and the spread of radical Islamist activity in the Horn of Africa and beyond. Kenya was wary of Uganda under Idi Amin who laid claim to western Kenya. Along with its East African neighbors, Kenya also has sought economic development and technical assistance, but did not want to appear heavily dependent upon the West. Kenya and Israel share security concerns as the former has witnessed such actions as al-Qaida blowing up the US embassy in Nairobi in August 1998, in which over 200 people died and thousands were wounded,⁹⁵ and al-Shabaab's attack in September 2013 on the Westgate Mall in the Kenyan capital that resulted in more than 60 deaths.

Although Uganda and Tanzania were very receptive to the approaches of Israel during the 1960s, disappointment in either the scope and or the extent of Israeli aid, the politics of the Cold War, and the intensification of the Arab-Israeli conflict during the 1970s and 1980s, soured those relations. Israel sought closer ties with South Africa, while Arab countries in the OAU (now AU) sought to emphasize these connections in order to distance the African states from Israel. With the end of the Cold War and the demise of Apartheid in South Africa shortly thereafter, the signing of the Oslo Accords aimed at achieving peace between Israel and the Palestinians, Uganda and Tanzania have had a more favorable attitude toward beneficial bilateral relations with Israel, although (like Kenya) they remain critical of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians at the AU and other international forums. This will probably be the case, until Israel and the Palestinians make progress in serious negotiations.

Israel's relations with East African states reflect the status of its ties with other African countries in general. Those states which have had the closest connections with the US and its allies in the West usually have been on the best terms politically with Israel, even during the time when formal relations were severed. Such has been the case with Kenya. One constant with Uganda, however, has been its leaders choosing relationships on what was best for maintaining internal political power. Tanzania, on the other hand, was most committed to solidarity with other countries in the developing world during the years of Nyerere's rule, which has left a legacy.

All three countries have been concerned with developing their economies and viable government institutions, although corruption has always been present. In terms of geopolitics, aside from Ethiopia, East African countries have played a greater strategic role for Israel than any other places on the continent with the exception of South Africa, especially during the 1970s and 1980s. In recent years, contacts by Israeli officials and businessmen with their counterparts from the region have been on the increase. Unlike during the early years, leaders in these countries have more realistic expectations of the benefits of mutual cooperation, while Israel (working sometimes in coordination with other Western countries) expands bilateral relations.

Ties with Kenya have advanced. President Uhuru Kenyatta visited Israel in February 2016 and, although traveling to the West Bank to Kibbutz Kalia to visit Kenyan students participating in an irrigation training program, did not meet with Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas, reportedly since the Israelis "could not coordinate . . . a last-minute request", although the Kenyans expressed regret.⁹⁶ During Kenyatta's visit, Netanyahu told a

group of Israeli lawmakers and ambassadors from African countries: “Israel is coming back to Africa. Africa is coming back to Israel. It’s happening in a big way.” The Knesset established a new Israel-Africa caucus chaired by Ethiopian-born MK Avraham Neguise.⁹⁷

Kenyatta invited Benjamin Netanyahu to visit Kenya. The trip, the first official visit to Africa by an Israeli prime minister since 1994, coincided with the 40th anniversary of the Entebbe rescue operation and included Uganda in the itinerary, where Netanyahu visited in 2005 to dedicate a plaque in honor of his brother’s memory at the old airline terminal in Entebbe. Netanyahu had planned to visit Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia in 2011, but cancelled due to security reasons.

Time will tell if Israeli-African relations will hold the same promise as in the early years; however, it is certain that the countries of East Africa are a prime area of Israel’s focus. Israel’s Ambassador to Kenya Yahel Vilan, who visited Tanzania in November 2015 for the inauguration of President John Magufuli, told a Tanzanian newspaper that given the expanding bilateral relationship, Israel would like to establish an embassy in Tanzania, but there were budget constraints.⁹⁸

NOTES

[All websites accessed in October 2015 unless otherwise stated.]

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5. Steven Carol, *From Jerusalem to the Lion of Judah and Beyond* (Bloomington, IN, 2012) is weighted heavily towards relations with Ethiopia and places emphasis on Israel’s bilateral ties.

6. Quoted in Joel Peters, *Israel and Africa* (London, 1992), 13.
7. Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs [hereafter MFA], "Diplomatic Missions Abroad: Status of Relations," accessed 20 September 2015, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutTheMinistry/Pages/Israel-s%20Diplomatic%20Missions%20Abroad.aspx>. The other resident embassies are located in Angola, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and South Africa.
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9. *Ibid.*, 272–3 and 278.
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11. *Ibid.*, 172 citing Julius K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (Dar es Salaam, 1968), 12.
12. Quoted in Susan Aurelia Gitelson, "Major Shifts in Recent Ugandan Foreign Policy," *African Affairs* 76.304 (1977): 362.
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14. Anthony John Hughes, *East Africa: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda* (Baltimore, 1963, revised 1969), 39.
15. Quoted in Olusola Ojo, *Africa and Israel* (Boulder, CO, 1988), 12.
16. Quoted in Bernard Reich, "Israel's Policy in Africa," *Middle East Journal* 18.1 (1964): 19.
17. Abel Jacob, "Foreign Aid in Agriculture: Introducing Israel's Land Settlement Scheme to Tanzania," *African Affairs* 71.283 (1972): 186–94.
18. Abel Jacob, "Israel's Military Aid to Africa, 1960–66," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 9.2 (1971): 165–6, 175–8. The other ten countries included Ethiopia, Ghana, Congo-Kinshasa (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), Sierra Leone, Dahomey (now Benin), Madagascar, and Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso); Israel only assisted the police in the last three states.
19. *Ibid.*, 178–85.
20. Naim, "Jomo Kenyatta and Israel," 4; and Dan Raviv and Yossi Melman, *Every Spy a Prince* (Boston, 1990), 154. According to Raviv and Melman, other important centers during the 1960s included Ghana, Liberia, and Congo-Kinshasa (known as Zaire 1971–97). Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *The Israeli Connection: Who Israel Arms and Why* (New York, 1987), 52 also mentions Ethiopia.
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26. Beit-Hallahmi, *Israeli Connection*, 61; and Gitelson, "Major Shifts in Recent Ugandan Foreign Policy," 363.
27. Ojo, *Africa and Israel*, 21.
28. Quoted in Oded, "Israeli-Ugandan Relations in the Time of Idi Amin," 3.
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33. Ojo, *Africa and Israel*, 34. The other countries were Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Togo, Zaire, and Zambia.
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35. Oded, "Israeli-Ugandan Relations in the Time of Idi Amin," 4–5; Gitelson, "Major Shifts in Recent Ugandan Foreign Policy," 366.
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